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**The Role of Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka as Projected in Tamilnadhi's  
Partheeniyam**

**Abstract:** The world has seen enough wars. The World War I and the World War II had direct impact on European literature. The Holocaust literature clearly portrayed the deep insights of these brutal wars. The Socialistic Revolution in Russia and China too had effected wide range of impact on literature. The wars that resumed in other countries were not less brutal than these wars that often questioned the very nature of humanity and the common sense. The world had little known about the ruthless bloody civil war in Sri Lanka. Unveiling the truth was too difficult when the government had imposed full censorship on the media and press. Sri Lanka which means “the good island” is in no way good to its Tamil minority community. The ethnic conflict between the Sinhala majority and the Tamil minority gradually lead to the armed struggle of some liberation groups. It later resulted in the Tamil ethnocide in Sri Lanka. This

paper focuses on the major role of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) during the turbulent Civil War from 1983 to 1990 in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the 1983 Racial Holocaust and the armed struggle of Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) against the Sinhala Government as depicted in the Tamil novel Partheeniyam by Tamilnadhi.

Keywords: ethnic conflict, IPKF, war.

“Normality is such a blessing - a blessing that we don't count until tragedy strikes.”

-Anita Pratap, Indian Journalist.

Sri Lanka is a tropical paradise where the beauty of nature co-existed with the ethnic conflict. The Buddhist land is known for the savagery of man-mass murders, bomb explosions, assassinations, civil wars, prison massacres, riots, death- squad murders, bombs on Christian churches, attacks on Buddhist temples, curfews, kidnappings, aerial strafing, landmines, ambushes, car bombs and suicide bombings. The country also became the subject of allegations of war crimes like violations of human rights, cases of human disappearances, ethnocide and genocide. It is always a matter of wonder how Buddhist countries like Vietnam, Myanmar and Sri Lanka have fallen into the pit of narrow nationalism and the prejudice against other ethnic races. Their failure to embrace the cultural diversities questioned the very purpose of Buddhist principles. The conflict between North and South Vietnam gradually lead to ethnic crisis and later into war. In Sri Lanka, the ethnic conflict between majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils resulted in the Tamil genocide of Sri Lanka in 2009. In the same way, the Myanmar's military carried out mass killings and gang rapes of Muslims of Rohingya with 'the genocidal intent' in 2017.

Mao Zedong, the Chinese communist revolutionary rightly remarks: “Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed.” Politics plays a vital role in Sri

Lankan ethnic conflict. One cannot easily differentiate politics from the common Tamil life. There were very few novels that exposed the full-fledged ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka. The novel, Partheeniyam is one of the notable novels about the ethnic struggle of Tamil Eelam, the separate homogenous Tamil nation for which many Tamils sacrificed their lives.

Partheeniyam is a Tamil novel by the Tamil Eelam writer Tamilnadhi. It was published in 2016 after the civil war. It clearly exposes how India's intervention of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict intensified the war further. It also picturizes how Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) became Innocent People Killing Force and how the saviors became the offenders.

Tamilnadhi is the pen name of Kalaivani. She was born in Triconamale, Sri Lanka. She graduated from Jaffna University in Arts. In 1992, she migrated to Canada because of the worst civil war and anti-Tamil attitude of Sinhala extremists. She is one of the prominent writers and has penned numerous books on Tamil Eelam. Eelam, Devathaigalum Kaivita Desham which means 'The Nation Disowned by the Angels Too' is one of her famous essays.

To understand the ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, it is important to know the history of Sri Lanka, formerly known as Cylone. The Sinhala Government has been discriminating against the Tamils since the British left in 1948. In ancient times, the Sinhalese had been paranoid about the Tamils because the successive northern Tamil kings threatened the rule of the Kandayan kingdom in the south. The Sinhala people are Aryans and the Tamils are Dravidians. No one really knew who came first to the island. During the British era, the minority Tamils were favoured which led them to be better educated and fluent in English and hold a high number of prominent positions in the government. After independence, the Sinhala-Buddhist Government ensured that the Tamils shared no power in the new Cylone. It introduced quota system in universities which gradually reduced the place for Tamils. It also passed the Sinhala Only Act in 1956, making Sinhala the only official language of Sri Lanka. In 1972, Cylone was given a Sinhala name, meaning 'the

good island'. To form Sri Lanka as the country of Fundamentalist Buddhism, the Christian Sinhala ruling class began converting their people back to Buddhism. Thus the Sinhala Buddhists became majority, giving no room for minority people in Sri Lanka. All these discrimination of the minority groups lead Christian Burghers to leave the country, and the British brought Indian plantation Tamils were being disenfranchised. In 1977, the Tamil political party Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) got elected as the opposition for the first time. By this time, Sinhala Buddhists had already stripped all the powers of minority groups and emerged as the most powerful ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Whenever the minority Tamils demanded the basic rights it always resulted in the Anti-Tamil violence. The Anti –Tamil violence in 1956, 1977 and 1983 initiated by the Sinhala extremists resulted in the death of thousands of Tamils. The Sinhala Government was behind all these violence against its own citizens. This was the reason why TULF began to demand autonomy for the Tamils in the north and the east in 1978. Mao Zedong said “War can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun.” All peaceful means of equal rights over a half century failed and hence the Tamil youth resorted to an armed struggle. Michael Ondaatje, the famous Sri Lankan- Canadian writer felt, “The reason for war was war” (43) in the same manner in his novel *Anil's Ghost*.

The novel *Partheeniyam* gives us a devastating portrayal of rupture between two communities from 1983 to 1990. It was the time the country headed into the serious ethnic trouble. In the name of ethnicity the walls of hatred were erected. The innocents were killed and the country was awash with horrific hatred and cruelty. Vasandhan and Vanathi are the main protagonists of this novel. In this novel, Tamilnadhi delineates agonizing personal experience of Vasandhan, the committed LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) cadre. Vasandhan's lover Vanathi plays a significant role in this novel and exemplifies the plight of innocent Tamil people.

It was the time when all the youngsters were joining armed groups in order to attain Tamil Eelam. There were many freedom struggle movements such as LTTE, EPRLF, EROS, PLOTE, TELO and TULF. Bharani and his friends joined LTTE. The militants of this armed movement received military style training from India and Lebanon. By this time, India was mindful of the emotional repercussions and the wave of the sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamils within India, especially in Tamil Nadu. For the first time, India intervened in Sri Lanka's internal matter by arming the Tamil military groups. Tamilnadhi gives the detailed descriptions of how the militants take up the military style training. The militants were directed to follow stringent rules. They directed to change their name and should not share any personal information with others. Thus Vasandhan changed his name as Bharani. The militants will not be informed of the whereabouts during the training period. For further training, Bharani and his friends came to Tamil Nadu, India where the training was exhausting with meagre food. The senior officer Muthusamy motivated them: "Che Guevara survived in freezing cold and heavy rain in Bolivian forest and he suffered from Asthma. At least you are given food. Che Guevara and his friends ate horses and monkeys in the forest for survival. In his diary he had also mentioned that he had even eaten rotten meat of the dead cat" (my trans.; 58). But later the militants were given financial assistance by the Tamilnadu Chief Minister, Mr. M.G. Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR. Subsequently, the militants were served good food.

Bharani suffered from internal piles because of the restless training. Bharani explains: "The hardships of the military training bring us close to the death. It sucks all our energy" (my trans.; 60). The trainer advised him that if he wanted to stop bloodshed in Sri Lanka he has to bare all the pain and suffering. Bharani tolerated all the pain for his dream of Tamil Eelam, the separate Tamil nation, and he understood that all the struggles will take him one step closer to his dream. He returned to Sri Lanka after some years once his training was over. He could not

match the real country he landed in. He felt completely alienated from his motherland, and his own world was slipping away, being destroyed beyond the recall. By this time the war between the Sinhala army and LTTE got intensified even further and it destroyed the peace of Tamil people. The Sinhala Government started “Operation Liberation” to clear the Tamil ethnic groups and also imposed economic ban on Tamil towns. No place was safe for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, and being Tamil was enough to get killed. Most of them left their houses and many lived in the bunkers. Vanathi and his parents started migrating from place to place. Migration was occurring in all the directions. The people did not know which way was safer for them but they were exceptionally good in the art of survival. To be orphaned in one’s own country was a tragic fate for a community. Vanathi was tired of living her life as a refugee in her motherland. Her love life with Bharani was once again questionable because of the war. Bharani and other group members were risking their lives for a separate nation. Many people died of starvation and poverty. The Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE were both sabotaging the innocent people. India did not remain passive and intervened once again in Sri Lanka’s internal matter. India assigned a mission called ‘Operation Poomalai’ (meaning Operation Garland) by Indian Air Force to air drop food supplies to the war zone people. The Indian Government was also facilitating peace between the militants and the Sri Lankan Government. The India- Sri Lanka Accord was signed between the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan President Jayewardene. According to the peace accord, Tamil would be recognized as a national language alongside Sinhala, and Tamils would have the chance to elect representatives for their autonomous north-east region. This paved the way for the arrival of the Indian troops in Sri Lanka to enforce clauses in the accord. The LTTE surrendered all its weapons and handed over the responsibility of saving the Tamils to the hands of IPKF. There was euphoria in the air. Arumainayagam, Vanathi’s father fancied permanent peace and says, “When the Sinhala army turned Jaffna into a graveyard in the name

of ‘Operation Liberation’, Rajiv Gandhi protected us. He is the savior, the protector and he is Mahathma Gandhi in modern dress. The very name Gandhi itself is the symbol of mercy” (my trans.; 269). The people believed, “if the Sinhala wages a tail, India will cut them off” (269). Bharani assured Vanathi, “If this accord really brings peace there is no barrier for us to unite” (my trans.; 270).

Tamilnadhi depicts how the war-weary Tamils could not understand the political game that was played out in front of them. Thanikachalam, the house owner of Vanathi, was the only one who understood that this accord would not bring everlasting peace. The Indian Peace Keeping Force could not control the colonization of the Sinhala people in Tamil areas. None of the suggestions in the accord was carried out by the Sri Lankan Government and remained only on papers. Eventually the LTTE started opposing the Indian Army and they returned to armed struggle again. Once again the war resumed in Sri Lanka, and the Indian army started arresting the LTTE cadres and their sympathizers to enforce the peace. The Indian army did not know the difference between the Tamils and the LTTEs and arrested many innocent youngsters suspecting them to be Tiger sympathizers. They raped so many young Tamil girls. Jenifer and Subathra were also victims. When Rajiv Gandhi was questioned about it in an interview, he said: “Indian soldiers are not gods. At the same time we are not demons. Rape happens everywhere, even in west” (my trans.; 407). This statement plainly reveals how Indian Peace Keeping Force slowly became Innocent People Killing Force in Sri Lanka. It also indulged in the disappearances of young Tamils. The people were heartbroken as peace once again eluded them. As LTTE cadres, Bharani and his friends ran away to the forest in order to escape from IPKF. Most of the friends, who had joined LTTE with him, were not alive. Vanathi believed that Bharani will be safe and alive somewhere. Once again the people started living as refugees in their motherland. Bharani was worried about Vanathi’s plight as a refugee.

Thileepan, twenty-three year old martyr, began his hunger strike, refusing food and water at Nallur Hindu Temple on 15 September 1987 demanding five approvals against the IPKF. He was known for his scholarly speeches that aroused common people to protest against the injustice. The people showed their discontent by supporting his non-violent protest. Vanadhi and her friends too participated in the hunger strike. After refusing food and water for 12 days, he died on 26 September 1987. He was the only one who died in Gandhian way instead of consuming cyanide like his other LTTE comrades. At the height of discontent, the people asked, “Is this the justice of Gandhian nation?” (my trans.; 290)

Tamilnadhi brings up authentic account of the clashes between LTTE and IPKF. She exposes how the Indians proved themselves as ruthless enemies. On 21 October, IPKF massacred nearly seventy patients and medical staff at Jaffna hospital, suspecting the presence of the Tigers there. The IPKF clearly breached all the Geneva Conventions of the war. The number of people killed by IPKF was more than the casualties of the war time. Other militant groups like EPRLF, PLOTE and TELO also joined hands with IPKF against LTTE. The IPKF also dropped bombs on the Tamil presses like Eela Murasu and Murasoli. Asirvatham angrily says, “The Sinhala extremists burnt down Jaffna library. Nazi’s burnt down the books of Jews and celebrated the end of extreme Jewish intellectualism. Now Indian Peace Keeping Force demolished the printing presses and arrested the journalists to make the people unaware of their injustice” (my trans.; 311).

Thanikachalam compared Partheniyam to the IPKF. The Partheeniyam is a plant that sucks all the energy from the land and never allows any plant to grow nearby. He thought that Partheeniyam and IPKF were the same. By seeing all the atrocities committed by the IPKF, Vanathi’s friend Githapongalan who never believed in armed force joined LTTE. He bitterly says, “Indian Peace Keeping Force. What an ironic adjective” (388). At the same time Bharani resigned from LTTE after experiencing internal politics in LTTE. He clearly understood that

Tamil Eelam was a dream beyond his reach. He had seen so many deaths and psychological trauma and lost his dearest people in the battle. He was disheartened realizing that there would be no true peace in his country as long as violence was used as a means to attain it. The people were dwelling between the path of violence and non-violence. The IPKF could not enforce peace. Nationalist sentiment led many Sinhalese to oppose the IPKF. Gradually the Sri Lankan Government called for India to quit. The President Premadasa requested India to pull out its troops from Sri Lanka. It resulted in returning of IPKF to India.

The people were very happy on knowing the return of IPKF. Major Sandeep, one of the IPKF soldiers says, “Don’t worry friends. The Tamils are killing themselves. Now EPRLF is killing the LTTE and its sympathizers. Then LTTE will kill EPRLF and its supporters” (my trans.; 460). He also said that for the peace of this Island, IPKF sacrificed thousands of Indian soldiers. Still peace could not prevail. India could not persuade peace in Sri Lanka because of so many reasons. The IPKF was totally unprepared and ill-equipped. The people were on the side of LTTE. IPKF did not get information on time. They did not have the maps of the land in which they are fighting. They had language problem. Jeevanandham, LTTE supporter, believed that the problem in Sri Lanka was not only ethnic conflict but every nation wanted to show its superiority. He says: “Now Indians are going. Tomorrow Chinese will come. Americans are waiting for the right time. They will do anything for Thiriconomale” (my trans.; 502).

The trustworthiness of the novel is doubtful in few places especially when Tamilnadhi portrays all the Tamil people as LTTE sympathizers. In some places Tamilnadhi fails to maintain neutrality as the novel justifies all the actions of LTTE. Whenever Vanathi’s friend Thanajayan questions about the atrocities of LTTE Tamilnadhi justifies as if for the greater good of a unified fight for a Tamil Eelam some sacrifices had to be made and some mistakes

overlooked. Though the novel is primarily about the role of IPKF in Sri Lanka, it fails to analyze the sacrifice of the IPKF.

The people were exhausted of endless war as the war paralyzed the normal life of people. Like the Americans in Vietnam and the Russians in Afghanistan, the Indians in Sri Lanka did not last long. Many critics labeled the IPKF role on the island as India's Vietnam. All the peace keeping activities resulted in nothing. It was the war that tarnished India's reputation. By continuing the war and indulging in violation of human rights, the tear drop shaped island began to resemble the drop of blood. In 2009, the merciless civil war ended. It had resulted in the death of 80,000 Tamil civilians. The Sri Lankan Government was accused of war crimes like human rights violation, the disappearances of the civilians, systematic ethnic cleansing and Tamil genocide.

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